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ABSTRACT

This speech by the U.S. Commissioner of Education surveys the impact of formal education in raising the level of intellectual and social achievement in America. It also discusses the role of the federal government in streamlining bureaucratic regulations and paperwork so that educational grants can be more readily available and more efficiently processed. In recognition of the demanding role school administrators fill, the author recommends a Leadership Institute, supported by the federal government, to provide the stimulation and time for self-renewal for overburdened superintendents and principals. (DOW,

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"ACCESS TO EXCELLENCE"

Remarks of

Ernest L. Boyer

United States Commissioner of Education

at the

Annual Convention of The National Association

of Secondary School Principals

Anaheim, California

Sunday, February 12, 1978

President Fallstrom, Executive Secretary Kernan I'm delighted to participate in this annual meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

This Association is one of America's most distinguished education groups and it is a special honor for me to meet with those of you who influence so significantly the course of American education every single day.

o o o

This evening I have one major message to convey.

o I'm convinced the time has come to speak out aggressively for education.

o It's time to say what's right about our Nation's schools.

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o It's time to recognize that while we have great problems in the classroom

--we have great accomplishments, as well

o And I'm convinced it's time to reaffirm the simple truth that schools and colleges are absolutely crucial to this great democracy.

I

Today by happy coincidence we celebrate the birthday of our most beloved president.

In 1832, when Abraham Lincoln announced his candidacy for the Illinois State assembly, he declared that:

> "Upon the subject of education... I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in."

This vision of a democracy built on education --which Lincoln declared to be our "most important subject" -- has been with us from the very first.

In Pennsylvania, in 1789, Benjamin Franklin offered his Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth. Franklin said that:

> "The good Education of Youth has been esteemed by wise Men in all Ages, as the surest Foundation of the Happiness both of private Families and of Commonwealths."

In Massachusetts, in 1780, the State Constitution proudly declared:

> "Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the people... (are) necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties."

In Virginia, in 1779, Thomas Jefferson affirmed that education and democracy are inseparable.

For people to be free and equal, he said, knowledge must be accessible to all.

As he put it:

--"Knowledge is power."
--"Knowledge is safety."
--"Knowledge is happiness."

o o o

To the immigrants who came to this land of promise

o it was education--rather than Ellis Island--that was the real gateway to America.

o It was education that enabled the sons and daughters of these brave pioneers to move ahead.

o Learning was synonomous with progress.

o And to many of these new Americans, getting an education was as essential as getting jobs.

o o o

During the early years of this century, settlers on New York's Lower East Side were influenced most dramatically by a publication called the Jewish Daily Forward.

Its editor, Abraham Cahan--himself an immigrant--also taught English late at night.

Cahan kept prodding the newcomers to gain an education.

"In America," he wrote, "a worker can sometimes even go to college and get an education. But it takes a long time. You must try to be an intellectual," he said "not just a doctor or a lawyer."

One of Cahan's colleagues on the paper wrote:

"We know workers have little time or strength to read day after day in the shop. But a half hour of serious reading every day for several years can provide an excellent education."

II

The simple truth is that the impact of formal education in this Nation has been pervasive.

- o In 1900, 11.3 percent of the American population was classified as illiterate.
- o By 1970 that figure had dropped to 1.2 percent.
- o In 1920, only 20 percent of our teenagers went on to secondary school.
- o By 1950, 76 percent of the Nation's youth was enrolled in high school--up more than 300 percent in just 30 years.
- o And by the start of this decade, more than 92 percent of America's teenagers were high school students.
- o In 1920, 15 percent of our high school graduates were going on to college.

- o By 1950 that figure had rocketed to 42.7 percent.
- o And today six out of ten high school graduates go on to higher education.

This remarkable expansion of our schools and colleges has created for the first time in human history what some have called a learning society. Take, for example, the books we publish in this country.

- o In 1927 we published slightly more than 10,000 new books and new editions.
- o In 1975 more than 35,000 new volumes and editions came off the press.
- o Between 1950 and 1976 the publication of science books alone jumped from 499 per year to 2,342.

Signs of intellectual growth were seen on other fronts as well.

We've made tremendous progress on our health--

- o We've virtually conquered polio, tuberculosis, whooping cough, and rheumatic fever.
- o Half a century ago, an American's life expectancy was about 57 years. Today an American can expect to live to be nearly 72.

We're the world's leader in biomedical research. Over the past four years, the United States won 10 of the 11 Nobel Prizes in medicine and physiology.

Our inventiveness is boundless, our technology is ingenious, and our contributions to science stand without peer. We have cracked the genetic code and landed a man on the moon. We have given the world

- o communications satellites,
- o rechargeable heart pacemakers,
- o the laser,
- o the television--
- o even the zipper.

I'm convinced that advances like these--great intellectual and social strides--reflect not only our national commitment to education, but also our relentless and phenomenally successful pursuit of excellence.

o o o

The point is this.

From the very first America has understood that formal education and informal education are inextricably interlocked in a democracy.

And this push for education is the engine that has driven our Nation's social and intellectual and economic progress.

o Education has transformed us into a literate society;

o Education has opened up good jobs and decent incomes;

o Education has sparked dramatic scientific progress;

o Education has improved our health and extended lives.

o And Education has given intelligence and vigor to our political institutions.

o o o

I happen to agree with Henry Steele Commager when he declared that "No other people ever demanded so much of education--none was ever served so well by its schools and educators."

And talk about

- o deschooling our society
- o or closing down our schools
- o not only rejects our heritage
  it also darkens hopelessly our
  prospects for the future.

III

Here I must insert a word of caution. While our accomplishments in education have been dramatic

--it's also true that many schools
and colleges are in trouble.

We have budget cuts

- o enrollment shifts
- o school closings
- o student dropouts
- o and controversies over tests

and often we have access to the classroom unmatched by academic excellence.

o These problems do exist.

o They are very real.

o And they must be candidly confronted by those of us who care about our children and our future.

o o o

But rather than bombard the school with constant condemnation

It's time to recognize that if we want good schools

o we must provide the resources
o and we must support the teachers and the principals who work hard for children every day.

We must--in short--place education once again at the top of our agenda as a Nation.

o o o

Just three weeks ago President Carter submitted his 1979 education budget to the Congress.

The proposed Office of Education budget is 12.7 billion -- a 2.3 billion increase over 1978.

o This increase is more than eleven percent in budget authority, and fourteen percent in outlays.

o Significan ly this is the first time in many years that an administration has accepted the congressional appropriation of the preceding year and it represents the most impressive Federal commitment to education in the Nation's history.

- o Sixty percent of the budget is for programs in elementary and secondary education. That's an increase of 15 percent.
- o $3.4 billion is set aside for Title I programs. That is an increase of $644 million.
- o And it includes $400 million for new Title I initiatives to improve educational opportunities for an additional 870,000 disadvantaged children.

o Funding for handicapped children will be increased by 50 percent.

o To help local school districts solve problems relating to desegregation, we have set aside $332.7 million.

o Another three quarters of a billion will be used to forward fund the Impact Aid program for the first time.

o The allocation for bilingual education is to be increased by $15 million. For Indian education the increase amounts to more than 25 percent.

The Federal Government is of course a junior education partner.

o And yet, we do have an obligation to help you with your work,

o and I'm determined to push aggressively for increased support in order to promote both access and excellence in the school.

But Federal leadership means not only more money -- it means less paperwork as well.

- o It means cutting out the mindless bureaucratic log jam.
- o It means trying to stop the endless flow of regulations that causes us to focus on the paper, not the people.

I cannot promise miracles, but I do want you to know we're working hard to eliminate some of of the Rube Goldberg procedures that seem to tie us in such silly knots.

First the regulation review and clearance time has been cut by one-half.

- o 18 percent--198 pages--of the text of the Office of Education's Code of Federal Regulations has been eliminated.
- o During the next five years, all Office of Education regulations will be recodified in clear and simple English.

Second we have coordinated the application process.

- o For the first time, we have published in the FEDERAL REGISTER a single, convenient notice of closing dates for discretionary program applications.
- o Applicants for OE programs finally have enough time to prepare quality applications.

Third we've cut out paperwork.

- o At the higher education level we've eliminated five million work hours by wiping out the duplicate application system in the Basic Grants program.
- o For elementary and secondary schools we've trimmed an additional 300,000 work hours by requiring from each grantee no more than one annual financial report and one annual performance report.

- o We have eliminated 820,000 work hours in 17 other reporting documents.
- o We are standardizing grantee reporting requirements.
- o And we are working toward the goal of a single common application form for our discretionary programs.

o o o

This is only a beginning but I'm convinced we must reduce the bureaucratic clutter if we hope to rebuild confidence in our schools -- and I urge you to report to me personally every example of irritating interference which should be remedied.

o o o

One final point--principals not only need resources and less paperwork, they also need more time to read and study and to grow professionally.

For years we recognized that physicians had to grow professionally.

More recently, lawyers and engineers and nurses have begun to develop lifelong programs.

And I'm convinced the time has come for those of us in education to recognize the need as well.

The simple truth is that good schools reflect good leadership.

It's the principal who can make the difference in the school.

It's the principal

who sets the goals
inspires teachers
communicates with parents
defends the program
and calls for new initiatives.

It's the principal who is the front line school leader in this Nation

- and I'm convinced the principal should not only be allowed to lead,
- but he or she should also be given time for study and renewal too.

o o o

This year -- as a part of the reauthorization for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act -- we're asking for discretionary money to promote educational quality on several fronts.

And one of the programs I intend to push is a Leadership Institute for school administrators

--small grants for principals and superintendents to grow professionally

--and free themselves occasionally from their urgent obligations.

The push for excellence in education is urgently related to our secondary schools and I can think of no better investment than to help those of you who push for excellence every single day.

o o o

One final word.

Dr. Lewis Thomas--author of Lives of a Cell, and a trustee of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer

Center -- said recently at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science that these are not the best of times for the human mind.

> All sorts of things seem to be turning out wrong, and the century seems to be slipping through our fingers here at the end, with almost all promises unfilled.
>
> I cannot begin to guess at all the causes of our cultural sadness, not even the most important ones, but I can think of one thing that is wrong with us and eats away at us: we do not know enough about ourselves.
>
> We are ignorant about how we work, about where we fit in, and most of all about the enormous, imponderable system of life in which we are embedded as working parts....It is a new experience for all of us. It's unfamiliar ground.
>
> Just think, two centuries ago we could explain everything about everything, out of pure reason, and now most of that elaborate and harmonious structure has come apart before our eyes.
>
> We are <u>dumb</u>.

Dr. Thomas's appeal is an eloquent one:

o it is a plea for more perspective,

o and it begins by searching for more knowledge about ourselves- where we come from, how we work, where we fit in, and where we want to go.

If this century does not slip forever through our fingers, it will be because our schools and colleges will have directed us away from our splintered dumbness, and will have helped us focus together in our common goals.

I'm convinced that as we declare what's right about our schools, confront realistically our problems, and support our leadership, we will educate adequately our children and have both access and excellence in our schools.

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